

Protects Medal of Honor Recipients, Part of Omnibus Package That Strengthens Veterans' Health Benefits

WASHINGTON - The House today approved the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009, S. 1963, which includes a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell to ensure that Medal of Honor recipients are eligible for health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs. S. 1963 passed the House by a bipartisan vote of 419 to 0.

An earlier version of the bill passed the Senate in November by a vote of 98 to 0. The House-passed changes now head to the Senate for final approval.

"We have a responsibility to our men and women in uniform," said Mitchell, who serves as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "Our veterans served our country, and it is our obligation to deliver the health care and benefits that they have earned and deserve."

The bill, S. 1963, would provide support to family - as well as others who care for disabled, ill, or injured veterans - while enhancing health services for 1.8 million women veterans. The bill also expands mental health services for veterans and health care access for veterans in rural areas, and prohibits copayments for veterans who are catastrophically disabled.

Mitchell's bipartisan bill, the Medal of Honor Health Care Equity Act, H.R. 1197, was included within S. 1963. Mitchell's bill assigned priority status for Medal of Honor recipients equal to that of former prisoners of war or Purple Heart recipients, with respect to the provision of veterans' hospital care and medical services provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs. This issue was brought to Mitchell's attention by officials, including Paula Pedene, at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix.

"The Medal of Honor is the military's highest decoration," said Mitchell. "We have a duty to ensure that each of these heroes, as well as future Medal of Honor recipients, are eligible for health care when they need it."

